

levels. it hardly amounts to a quarter of what Nature intends it to be. This fall is customarily imputed to the deliberate use of preventives against child-bearing. but we must hesitate to conclude that an artificiality which has not influenced the continuity of the race throughout countless centuries should, within a single generation, have become so widely adopted as to diminish the reproductiveness of a whole population by as much as a third. Undoubtedly it has an effect—and a great effect—in limiting the size of families amongst certain classes of the community. But we must not forget that the falling birth-rate has been accompanied by changes that are of immense importance to reproductiveness—a fall in the proportionate number of marriages, and a rise in the age at which marriage is contracted. In England, within the last forty years the proportion of marriageable women that are married has fallen from 57 to 46 per cent. It has been shown by elaborate statistical investigations that woman's potential fertility—her prospect of bearing children—which is at its maximum when she is 18, diminishes exceedingly rapidly as her age advances : indeed at 28 it has probably fallen by almost 40 per cent. Moreover it seems that a woman who is married in youth maintains her potential fertility longer than one who is unmarried—in fact, that a woman of 28

who was
married at 18 has a better chance of
bearing off-
spring than a bride of 28. In a less
degree man's
potential fertility also declines as his
age advances
over 25. Since the English birth-rate
first showed
signs of declining—forty years ago—the
average
age of brides has risen by 2 years, and
that of
bridegrooms by 3 years, and the
proportion of
married women who are under 25 has
fallen from
15 to 10 per cent. The effect of this
change in